

Critical survey

A new and revived interest in media and disgust emerges from several sources. One is the actual production of new work with increased levels of spectacle, more explicit depiction of violence and extreme behavior, and a wider spread of materials due to globalization.¹

There is also an increased media study of audiences and audience response including emotions, and specifics rather than the previous vague formalist gesture to analyzing film with reference to a vague ahistorical and unspecific reference to film as creating “the subject” (viewer).

And there is a flourishing interest in the large question of affect and the emotions coming from outside the media field and within it.

Outside

Aesthetics

Carroll

Korsmeyer

Philosophy

Kolnai

Sartre

Nussbaum

Culture

Goffman, Stigma (sociology)

Douglas, Purity and Danger (anthropology)

Kristeva, Abjection (lit. theory)

History/Culture

Miller

Behavioral Science

Rozin

Within film studies

General

Sobchack

Barker

¹ One of the most observable changes has been the creation of a marketing categories such as Asian Extreme and Torture Porn. Asian horror film (especially Japan) has been regarded as ramping up extreme effects, and some of the key films have been remade in the West. At the same time, the audience demographics also favor extreme sensation in popular film. And the broad category of European art film has also opened to increasingly bold assaults on audience sensibilities. (e.g., *Anti-Christ*). But it is worth noticing that as much as this is noted as a “problem” in the USA, it also is seen in much of the world as part of the expansion of sex and violence in media entering from “outside,” mostly Hollywood.

Marks
Specific
Plantinga (emotions)
Hanich

Distinguishing Disgust and Distress

The term “disgust” is often used in everyday conversation to mark something generally objectionable to the speaker: “that’s disgusting” is a value judgment marking off something the speaker doesn’t like, which could be something that could be actually tasted, something open to the senses, or more abstractly, some thing or some activity which isn’t just different and not favored, but thought of adversely, something to avoid, distance oneself from, scorn. When applied to film analysis, this broader use of the term “disgust” moves over into what is more accurately described as “distress” most of the time.

I want to use the term “disgust” more precisely to describe a specific emotion in the narrowest sense, and a little more broadly an affect, specifically instigated by the film experience.² By this I mean to turn back to a reference to disgust (in English and in French) as expressed primarily in the sense of taste, that is, located in the mouth and nose. Most of the recent and thoughtful writers on disgust start here, often marking disgust as an aversion reaction formed initially by the infant in something offensive to the taste. But it is also an emotion that is cultured, cultivated, developed in a social framework. So however functional it is for self-preservation with the newborn, it is elaborated with a fuller range of connections to the sensible world, and eventually to the imaginative and ethical world.

So, fundamentally, disgust is a visceral emotion, centered on taste and augmented by smell and touch, and more distantly sight and hearing. But it also, because of its cultural development, lends itself to moral judgment.

Behavioral psychologist Paul Rozin focuses on the mouth as the boundary source for disgust (matching the etymology of the term in “taste”).

Legal philosopher Martha Nussbaum sees the core of the disgust reaction as a response to something that provokes the recognition that human beings are foundationally animal in nature (however divine or spiritual they may also be thought to be) and are mortal. The provoking disturbance is a reminder of animal vulnerability and death. To extend this to film, images of fleshy degeneration, be that through disease, injury, infection, infestation, especially when accompanied by excretions and secretions from the body, or visible disfigurement often provoke disgust in some viewers.

² In marking affect, I’m indebted to Carl Plantinga’s article, “Disgusted at the Movies” and more broadly his book, *Moving Viewers*, which concludes with an analysis of disgust as earlier stated in the article.

Public Toilet moves from disgust to human understanding, from the physical (and sometimes comic) and the spiritual (and usually opaque) to a

Summary from wimal.

Band of young people, alienated from world they find themselves in, in a quest, odyssey, but without any particular outcome promised. Not so much a failure as an emptiness, a to-be-done, a kind of global emptiness....they deserve better, can they move it?

Batch of guys in Beijing, from Somalia, Italy, Hong Kong, and Beijing.

Scenes: Pusan, Korea; Beijing China; the Great Wall, China; New York City; India (train to Benares) and Benares (holy city at end of the Ganges), Hong Kong.

In this transnational world, connected by cell phones, someone in New York City connects with someone at the Great Wall. A Korean guy in Benares talks with someone in Pusan. The old Indian man going to bath in the Ganges is accompanied by his two sons who are visiting India for the first time. Their father managed a public toilet in Hong Kong (and now they work there).

But within this, individual moments of human connection.

On the train in India on the way to Benares, an elderly man who is ailing needs help getting to and using the toilet on the train, and a young traveler from abroad helps him. An old man confined to a hospital bed has his 12 year old roommate (who is dying of stomach cancer) help with a mechanical bedpan. Two old guys who spent their lifetime fruitlessly hoping to marry a woman and gently quarreling with each other. After one dies (in a communal toilet, slipping away unattended), the survivor visits the woman (now unconscious) in the hospital and begs to marry her, so he won't be alone. A young commercial fisherman finds an "ocean woman" has climbed up the waste pipe of his seaside portable outhouse; she discusses how increasing pollution has killed off her family as well as sea life. A young woman takes her wheelchair bound elderly relative on an arduous trip to a shaman at the Great Wall, hoping for a cure. The young people go off on journeys trying to find cures (such as ginseng in Korea) or miracles (bathing in the Ganges) that can help their ailing friends and relatives, but to no avail.

The narrator, Dong Dong (check) explains that he hangs out with a group of international guys from school, from Somalia, Italy,check

We meet them as they run into an old fashioned communal latrine where occupants sit openly in facing rows squatting over holes; it's full, and they run out laughing. Dong Dong explains that in the past childbirth was considered filthy, and that babies were often born in toilets. He himself was found by a woman floating in the waste under the toilet floor, rescued, and then adopted. This is shown with flashbacks including plucking an obvious plastic doll-baby from the mess.